

Sri Lankan military 'raping Tamil Tigers'

The Sri Lankan military is using rape and extreme sexual violence against men and women suspected of links to the defeated Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), according to a report by Human Rights Watch.



Human Rights Watch report of 75 cases of rape and sexual assault by members of the Sri Lankan security forces from 2006 to 2012 Photo: AP

By Dean Nelson, New Delhi

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The international human rights group said rape and sexual violence against Tamil Tiger suspects was common during the 26 year long civil war which ended with the LTTE's defeat in 2009 but continues to be used today against the government's political opponents.

Its report details 75 cases of rape and sexual assault by members of the Sri Lankan security forces from 2006 to 2012 – three years after the civil war ended when the army encircled the remaining LTTE forces in a tiny 'no-fire zone' in the far north of the country and killed most of its leaders.

The Sri Lankan government has been accused of war crimes for its conduct of the final stages of the war, including allegations that thousands of civilians were killed by shelling of the 'no-fire zone' but has rejected the claims as politically motivated. Opponents say it has developed a siege mentality and allowed a culture of impunity to continue.

Last week, Channel Four News published photographs it said indicated the son of the late LTTE leader Prabhakaran had been shot dead while in the custody of Sri Lankan security forces. The government has strongly denied the claims and said it believes photographs, showing the 12 year old boy alive in dead in army custody, were 'morphed.' These latest allegations of continuing abuses will further isolate Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa and intensify international pressure on his government amid growing concerns over the country's human rights record.

Human Rights Watch said it had interviewed most of the 75 victims whose cases it details after they had fled the country and said their testimony revealed that those detained as LTTE suspects remained under threat. "The Sri Lankan security forces have committed untold numbers of rapes of Tamil men and women in custody. These are not just wartime atrocities but continue to the present, putting every Tamil man and woman arrested for suspected LTTE involvement at serious risk." said the group's Asia director Brad Adams.

The victims accounts, many of which, it said, were corroborated by medical and legal statements, revealed a pattern of kidnap by unidentified men in plain clothes followed by interrogation and sexual assault in a detention centre by security servicemen.

A 32-year-old woman said she was stripped and photographed naked by two men in plain clothes who had abducted her.

"They told me to confess about everything. I refused to confess as I thought they would kill me. I was beaten up and tortured continuously. On the second day, a man came to my room and raped me. I was raped by different men on at least three days. I can't remember how many times," she told the group.

The Sri Lankan government has dismissed claims of human rights abuses as propaganda circulated by Tamil groups and political opponents.



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